

# Palouse Watershed, WRIA 34

This focus sheet provides information on the availability of water for new uses in the Palouse Watershed. This information provides a starting point for potential water users in determining the likelihood of obtaining a new water right for a future project or proposal in this area.

The Palouse Watershed, also known as Water Resource Inventory Area 34 (WRIA 34), is located in eastern Washington and includes the Palouse River and its numerous tributary creeks and streams. The Palouse River originates in the mountains of Idaho.

The annual precipitation in the watershed ranges from 10 inches per year near the confluence of the Palouse and Snake Rivers, to 20 inches in the higher elevations along the Idaho border. Only a fraction of this precipitation becomes groundwater available for human and economic uses. Most of the rain and snow arrive during the winter months, when water use is lowest. During the summer, the snowpack is gone, there is little rain, and naturally low stream flows are dependent on groundwater. This means that groundwater and surface water are at their lowest when water demands are at their highest.

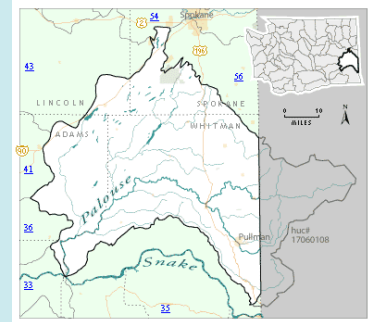
Much of the water in the Palouse Watershed has already been spoken for (appropriated). Increased demands from population growth, declining groundwater levels, and impacts from climate change are adding to the challenge of finding new water supplies in WRIA 34, especially during the summer months.

## Factors affecting water availability

The WRIA 34 planning unit completed recommendations for instream flows, allocation limits, and a reservation for new permit-exempt wells for the North Fork Palouse River.

The Columbia Basin Project (CBP) is a federally-authorized project with multiple purposes: irrigation, power production, flood control, municipal water supply, recreation, and fish and wildlife benefits. The CBP canal system provides water for much of the agricultural irrigation in the Columbia basin. Water is imported from the Columbia River and is redistributed through canals and stored groundwater. The CBP has three distinct subareas: Odessa, Quincy, and the “508-14.”

## MORE INFORMATION



## Definitions

**Adjudication:** A legal process conducted through a superior court to determine the extent and validity of existing water rights.

**Appropriation (of water):** The process of legally acquiring the right to use specific amounts of the public water resource for beneficial uses. Water rights (appropriations) are the right to use water, not own the water, and have specific conditions attached.

**Consumptive use:** A use of water that diminishes the amount or quality of water in the water source.

**Instream flows:** Flow levels adopted into an administrative rule to protect fish, wildlife, stock watering, recreational uses, and other instream uses and values.

**Mitigation plan:** A scientifically-sound plan to offset the impacts of a proposed water use.

**Surface water source limitation:** A recommendation from the Dept. of Fish & Wildlife that flows be protected to maintain fish populations. RCW 77.57.020

A small portion of the Odessa Subarea (defined in WAC 173-128A and regulated as in WAC 173-130A) is located within western WRIA 34. The irrigation in this subarea is largely developed with groundwater. Groundwater levels in the Odessa Subarea aquifer are declining rapidly in many places and as a result, groundwater is not available for new uses.

## Adjudications

The Cow Creek & Sprague Lake adjudication is the only one completed within WRIA 34. In general, most of the water in this adjudicated basin has been allocated and new appropriations are not available.

## Groundwater

In general, availability and yield of groundwater from bedrock in this WRIA is very limited by climate and geology. Many areas are in decline, meaning little if any water is available for new consumptive uses.

The West Plains is a plateau southwest of the Spokane River, within the northern portion WRIA 34. The Columbia River Basalt Group aquifers underlying the West Plains supply water to the communities of Airway Heights, Medical Lake, Four Lakes, and Fairchild Air Force Base. Groundwater levels have significantly declined in some areas, indicating the groundwater resource is strained. Water in the West Plains is generally considered over-appropriated, that is, no water is available for new consumptive uses.

The sub-basin located around the towns of Pullman and Moscow, Idaho is on the eastern edge of WRIA 34. As with the West Plains, groundwater levels in certain areas have significantly declined, and no water is available for new consumptive uses.

## Surface water

The Palouse Watershed has administrative restrictions known as Surface Water Source Limitations (SWSL), which limit most water sources in the watershed. Groundwater connected to the surface sources are also subject to SWSL restrictions.

The following water sources are closed from June 15 to September 1:

Badger Lake	Imbler Creek	Pine Creek
Cache Creek	Packer Creek	Rebel Flat Creek
Cottonwood Creek	Palouse River south fork	Rock Creek
Downing Creek	Palouse River main stem	Thorn Creek
Four Mile Creek	Paradise Creek	Union Flat Creek

Silver Lake is closed all year to new uses, as most of the water is already spoken for (appropriated).

## Water supply available for new uses

The Palouse watershed is not closed to new water uses. However, the majority of water has been appropriated and new uses are subject to restrictions, including being junior to the instream flows.

The groundwater permit exemption allows certain users of small quantities of groundwater (most commonly, single residential well owners) to construct wells and develop their water supplies without obtaining a water right permit from Ecology. For more information about the groundwater permit exemption, refer to [www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/fwr92104.pdf](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/fwr92104.pdf).

The permit exemption may not be available to prospective water users in certain areas that are closed to further appropriation because there is limited or no water available. Check with Ecology staff at the regional office for more information.

The Office of Columbia River (OCR) is aggressively pursuing water supply development opportunities throughout the Columbia Basin. You can find additional information at the OCR Web site at: [www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/cwp/crwmp.html](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/cwp/crwmp.html).

Additional options for finding a water supply include:

- Connecting to an established water supplier. This is the fastest and simplest option.
- Proposing mitigation to offset the impacts to surface water and groundwater.
- Processing a change application with the Whitman County Water Conservancy Board.
- Processing an application through the Cost Reimbursement Program.  
[www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/0511016.pdf](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/0511016.pdf).

For more information on these and other options, refer to “[Alternatives for Water Right Application Processing](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/1111067.pdf)” [www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/1111067.pdf](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/1111067.pdf).

## **Pending water right applications in this watershed**

Washington water law is based on the “prior appropriation” system, often called “first in time, first in right.” Applications for water from the same source must be processed in the order they are received.

Ecology asks anyone who needs a water right (new, change, or transfer) to submit the pre-application consultation form and meet with us to review your water supply needs and project proposal.

- Apply for a New Water Right  
<http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/rights/newrights.html>
- Apply to Change or Transfer a Water Right or Claim  
[http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/rights/change\\_transfer\\_use.html](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/rights/change_transfer_use.html)

The map on the last page of this document includes the WRIA boundaries and where SWSLs are in effect. Other information sources to assist with your research include:

- Locate and research water rights on land parcels anywhere in the state (Water Resource Explorer)  
<http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/info/webmap.html>
- Pending Water Right Applications by County  
<http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/rights/tracking-apps.html>
- Subscribe to a water right application RSS feed for a county or WRIA  
[http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/rights/wr\\_app\\_rss.html](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/rights/wr_app_rss.html)

- WRIA map showing the total number of water right claims, certificates, permits and applications  
<http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/rights/Images/pdf/waterright-wria-maps.pdf>
- Search and view well reports using a variety of search tools  
<https://fortress.wa.gov/ecy/waterresources/map/WCLWebMap/default.aspx>

### For more information

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Water Resources Program  
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Spokane, WA 99205-1295  
509-329-3400

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Persons with hearing loss can call 711 for Washington Relay Service. Persons with a speech disability can call 877-833-6341.*



